

PEOPLE - Sumner, Cid

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Article Heading

Sumner, Cid Ricketts
Sep. 27, 1890-Oct. 15, 1970 Author

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"Tall, gracious with luminous hazel eyes and a smile that lights up her face, she is beautiful and consistently charming. She is a happy combination of logic and fair-mindedness, too, but I think of her primarily as a person of warm and deep understanding. It is a quality that reflects the inner radiance of her mind, one that enables her to write or talk discerningly of the controversial without being controversial herself."

This is a description of Mrs. Cid Ricketts Sumner by her son-in-law, John Henry Cutler, a description which has been readily confirmed by those who know her. Her readers, who have followed the fortunes of the characters in her novels from Ann Singleton to The Hornbeam Tree, feel that she must be just that kind of person, or she could not write about people so understandingly and intelligently.

Bertha Ricketts (such a calm baby that her family called her Placid, then shortened to Cid) was born on September 27, 1890 in Brook-haven, Mississippi, the only girl in a family of three children. She is of English and Scottish descent with a dash of Irish. Her father, Robert Scott Ricketts, taught in colleges in Mississippi for over forty years, and her mother, the former Bertha Burnley, was a music school teacher. Bertha was tutored at home, then attended Jackson, Mississippi, High School and Millsaps College where she majored in chemistry and English and received the B.S. degree in 1909. An excellent student, she won the D.A.R. essay medal, the scholarship prize at the end of her first two years, and the senior essay medal. She received a master's degree in English and psychology at Columbia University in 1910, then taught English at Jackson High School. She returned to Columbia for a year and then transferred to the Cornell University Medical School. She left in 1915 to marry Dr. James Batcheller Sumner, (who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1946).

Mrs. Sumner has taught both English and French, the latter in Millsaps College. Her first love, however, is writing. She has published poetry and short stories, but her most important work has been her novels. Ann Singleton (1938), first published as a serial, is the story of a young woman scientist appointed to a laboratory position in a little southern town, and the gossip she incites because of her self-sufficiency. Of it, the New York Times said: "Ann and Dexter are ably characterized and the interest of the story is in general well sustained."

Quality (1946), which was called "Pinky" in its motion picture adaptation, was the story of the problems of an educated Negro girl who returned to her Southern home after passing as white in the North. Of this book, which was a Negro Book Club choice, S. I. Hayakawa said in Book Week: "Mrs. Sumner, white, and born in the



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South, has written a book of genuine human insight and social perception. I hope it becomes a best seller."

Tammy Out of Time (1948) tells of Tammy who, after having spent her seventeen years on a Mississippi houseboat, found a different life and love at Peter Brent's plantation home near Natchez. Of this Peoples Book Club choice, Anne Whitmore said in the Library Journal that there is "nothing original in this 'poor, uneducated girl meets and catches college educated son of a snobbish family' theme, but the conversation is original ... Recommended."

But the Morning Will Come (1949) a Fiction Book Club choice, is the story of a Southern white girl and her reactions when she discovers that her coming child will inherit Negro blood. W. K. Rugg said in his review in the Christian Science Monitor, "Grace in the writing, warm appreciation of the emotional involvements, and of the relationship between background and action are impaired only by the disturbing impression that Bentley, telling her story in the first person, is viewing herself from the outside."

Sudden Glory (1951), a Peoples Book Club selection, is the story of Rhoda Lee Dalton, who is a charming fifteen-year-old when the book begins, and when it ends a few years later is a very grown-up young lady. This novel of family life in Mississippi in the years after the Civil War was praised in the Chicago Sunday Tribune by Henry Cavendish, who said, "The fluent writing is tightly woven, the characters are real, and for my money Sudden Glory is a fresh breath of clean atmosphere blowing through the mildewed pages of other period pieces long since gone sour."

Mrs. Sumner's latest book, The Hornbeam Tree (1953), is the story of the decision Miss Eva Iveson makes when at fifty, freed from the family responsibilities that had kept her from the adventures and romances she had secretly longed for, she falls in love. Of this story of New England small town life, Hubert Creekmore in the New York Times said, "Cid Ricketts Sumner, in her story of Miss Eva Iveson has achieved only a moderate success. But she has managed the plotting with skill and sprinkled the story with humorous touches."

Now, Mrs. Sumner is working on a musical and is writing poetry. This versatile woman is five feet seven inches tall, weighs 140 pounds, and has hazel eyes and gray hair. She is a Protestant and, as she puts it a "variable Democrat." She is an excellent cook, plays the piano and harp, paints, and sews.

Although she writes mostly about the South, she has spent half of her life in New York and Massachusetts (now in Duxbury), and loves Capri and Scotland.

She was divorced from Dr. Sumner in 1930. She is the mother of four children: Roberta Rand (Mrs. John Henry Cutler), Prudence Avery (Mrs. Edward Gamard), James Cosby Ricketts Sumner and Frederick Burnley Sumner.

Works about subject

Warfel, H. R. American Novelists of Today (1951); Who's Who in America, 1954-55

Descriptor

novelists ; FICTION WRITERS; WRITERS ; Sumner, Cid Ricketts

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